



# THE DERBY DISPATCH

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## LUCRATIVE REBEL HEADLINES THIS WEEK'S ROAD TO KENTUCKY DERBY

**LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Thursday, March 15, 2018)** – One week after **Bolt d'Oro**, **McKinzie** and **Justify** dazzled at Santa Anita, another potential California star will get his chance to shine some 1,600 miles from his home base.

**Zayat Stables LLC's** Breeders' Cup Juvenile (Grade I) runner-up **Solomini**, from the potent barn of Hall of Fame trainer and four-time Derby winner **Bob Baffert**, has been made the 3-2 morning line favorite against 10 rivals in Saturday's \$900,000 Rebel (Grade II) at Oaklawn Park in Hot Springs, Ark.

The 1 1/16-mile Rebel also attracted Hopeful (GI) winner **Sporting Chance** from the barn of 82-year-old legend **D. Wayne Lukas**; trainer **Steve Asmussen's** three-time stakes runner-up **Combatant**; and a slew of promising prospects led by unbeaten **Todd Pletcher**-trainee **Magnum Moon**.

The Rebel, which serves as a steppingstone to the \$1 million Arkansas Derby (GI) on April 14 and helps determine the field for this year's \$2 million Kentucky Derby Presented by Woodford Reserve (GI), will award 85 points to the Top 4 finishers – 50 to first, 20 to second, 10 to third and 5 to fourth.

Saturday's Rebel has been carded as Race 10 at Oaklawn Park with a post time of 7:09 p.m. (all times Eastern).

Earlier in the day, Turfway Park will stage a pair of races over their synthetic Polytrack that will award points for the Derby and Longines Kentucky Oaks.

The Grade III, \$200,000 Jeff Ruby Steaks (formerly known as the Spiral) at 1 1/8 miles and the Grade III, \$100,000 Bourbonette Oaks for 3-year-old fillies at one mile had their points modified from 50-20-10-5 to 20-8-4-2 for the 2018 renewals.

The Bourbonette goes as Turfway Park's Race 9 at 5:14 p.m. and the Jeff Ruby Steaks follows at 6 p.m.

Total points accrued by 3-year-old Thoroughbreds in Road to the Kentucky Derby races will ultimately determine the preference list for the 1 1/4-mile classic at Churchill Downs on Saturday, May 5. – **Darren Rogers**

## SOLOMINI LOOKING TO GIVE BAFFERT A SEVENTH WIN IN \$900,000 REBEL (GII)

Hall of Fame trainer **Bob Baffert** has won six of the past eight runnings of the \$900,000 Rebel (GII), a fact that will contribute to **Solomini's** favoritism in Saturday's renewal of the 1 1/16-mile Kentucky Derby (GI) prep at Oaklawn Park.

Virtually awarding a slot in the Churchill Downs starting gate with 50 qualifying points going to the winner, the Rebel has been won three times by the eventual winner of the classic, including Baffert's Triple Crown-winning **American Pharoah** in 2015.

Like that superstar, **Solomini** has been carrying the colors of **Ahmed Zayat** in four previous starts. Now, **Solomini** is owned in partnership by Zayat and **Coolmore**, who stand American Pharoah at Ashford Stud in Kentucky.

Generally considered the third best juvenile of his generation, **Solomini** proved second best to **Bolt d'Oro** in the FrontRunner (GI) and to champion **Good Magic** in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile (GI) before posting a hard-fought score over **McKinzie** and **Instilled Regard** in the Los Alamitos Futurity (GI). However, the stewards demoted him to third for stretch interference against **Instilled Regard**.

### ROAD TO THE KENTUCKY DERBY TOP 25

#	Horse	Trainer	Points
1.	Bolt d'Oro	Mick Ruis	64
2.	Enticed	Kiaran McLaughlin	63
3.	Bravazo	D. Wayne Lukas	54
4.	Promises Fulfilled	Dale Romans	52
5.	Quip	Rudolphe Brisset	50
6.	McKinzie	Bob Baffert	40
7.	Good Magic	Chad Brown	34
8.	Flameaway+	Mark Casse	30
9.	Firenze Fire	Jason Servis	29
10.	Free Drop Billy	Dale Romans	24
11.	Snapper Sinclair	Steve Asmussen	22
12.	Strike Power	Mark Hennig	20
13.	Old Time Revival	Kenneth Decker	20
14.	Instilled Regard	Jerry Hollendorfer	19
15.	Solomini	Bob Baffert	14
16.	Catholic Boy	Jonathan Thomas	14
17.	Avery Island	Kiaran McLaughlin	14
18.	My Boy Jack	Keith Desormeaux	12
19.	Combatant	Steve Asmussen	12
20.	Greyvitos	Adam Kitchingman	10
21.	Audible	Todd Pletcher	10
22.	Kanthaka	Jerry Hollendorfer	10
23.	World of Trouble	Jason Servis	10
24.	Lombo	Mike Pender	10
25.	Noble Indy	Todd Pletcher	10

+ Not currently Triple Crown nominated but connections intend to pay \$6,000 late fee due March 19.

### UPCOMING ROAD TO THE DERBY RACES

Date	Race	Track	Top 4 Points
March 17	Rebel	OP	50-20-10-5
March 17	Spiral	TP	20-8-4-2
March 24	Louisiana Derby	FG	100-40-20-10
March 25	Sunland Derby	Sun	50-20-10-5
March 30	Burradon*	Newcastle	30-12-6-3
March 31	UAE Derby	Meydan	100-40-20-10
March 31	Florida Derby	GP	100-40-20-10
April 7	Wood Memorial	Aqu	100-40-20-10
April 7	Blue Grass	Kee	100-40-20-10
April 7	Santa Anita Derby	SA	100-40-20-10
April 14	Arkansas Derby	OP	100-40-20-10
April 14	Lexington	Kee	20-8-4-2

\* European Road to the Kentucky Derby

Both of those rivals have franked the form of the Futurity this season, with stablemate McKinzie taking the Sham (GIII) and losing the San Felipe (GII) via disqualification, while Instilled Regard (GIII) came home best in the Lecomte (GIII) at Fair Grounds.

Winning first time off the bench has not been an issue with some prep winners this winter, but Solomini figures to get a stern test from various quarters. Three-time Rebel winner **Steve Asmussen** has a trio of colts to saddle including **Combatant**, who's also endured a string of minor placings with seconds in the Springboard Mile, Smarty Jones, and Southwest (GIII). A more contentious pace on a fast surface could aid his chances toward a breakthrough.

Asmussen also has recent allowance winner **Title Ready**, who has some early foot and will break from post 1 on Saturday, and the deep-closing **Zing Zang**, who couldn't get going in the Southwest mud and has been compared to the barn's 2016 Arkansas Derby (G1) and Belmont S. (G1) winner **Creator**.

**Sporting Chance**, the Hopeful (GI) winner, has shown erratic behavior in the stretch of his last two starts, but figures to move forward in his second start of the year following a distant third-place finish in the Southwest.

**High North**, unplaced in two stakes appearances, remains well-regard by trainer **Brad Cox**. Fifth last time in the Risen Star, the colt was fourth two back in the Kentucky Jockey Club (GII), the profile of which has risen dramatically following early-season Derby preps.

Three stakes debuters will also merit attention. The **Todd Pletcher**-trained **Magnum Moon** enters the Rebel in similar fashion to **Malagacy**, who debuted last January and captured the Rebel in his third career start. Magnum Moon has won comfortably in both starts, first in a Gulfstream maiden and last time against an overmatched field in a Tampa Bay Downs allowance.

**Higher Power** missed the Southwest due to an illness, but the **Pin Oak** homebred has a potentially bright future if his Jan. 13 allowance win over a mile is any indication. Racing in tight quarters down the backside, the Medaglia d'Oro half-brother to Oaklawn H. (GII) winner **Alternation** overcame a less-than-ideal trip to prevail over next-out winner **New York Central**.

**Curlin's Honor**, a **Mark Casse**-trained son of 2007 Rebel winner Curlin, has won twice in photo finishes, both times at six furlongs.

The field is rounded out by longshots **Pryor** and **Bode's Maker**. – **Vance Hanson, Brisnet.com**

## PLETCHER DUO AMONG DOZEN IN JEFF RUBY STEAKS (GIII)

Don't look for much separation on the morning line in Saturday's \$200,000 Jeff Ruby Steaks (GIII). A well-matched field of 12 has been entered for the Kentucky Derby qualifier on Turfway Park's Polytrack and half the field is listed at either 5-1 or 6-1 in the race formerly known as the Spiral Stakes.

The 1 1/8-mile race will award points on a 20-8-4-2 scale.

**Hazit**, who is best known for defeating eventual 2-year-old champion **Good Magic** in a Travers Day maiden race, has been installed as the 5-1 co-favorite. The War Front colt will make his second start this year for **Todd Pletcher** following a runner-up effort in an entry-level allowance at Tampa Bay

Downs on Feb. 18 and **Drayden Van Dyke** picks up the mount.

Pletcher will also send out **Pony Up**, who recorded back-to-back seconds in the Pulpit and Kitten's Joy on Gulfstream Park's turf. The son of Aikenite could appreciate the switch to synthetic after a well-beaten fifth in the Feb. 3 Holy Bull (GII) and **Albin Jimenez** rides. Pony Up is one of a quartet at 6-1.

**Ride a Comet** will bring a two-race win streak into his stakes bow, most recently taking a grassy Fair Grounds allowance, and the **Mark Casse** pupil is pegged at 5-1 with **Gabriel Saez**. **Archaggelos** likes synthetic surfaces, capturing the Grey (GIII) two starts back on Woodbine's Tapeta, and **Rafael Hernandez** will be up for **Michael Dickinson**.

**Blended Citizen** and **Mugaritz**, third and fourth in the Feb. 17 El Camino Real Derby (GIII) at Golden Gate Fields, have shipped in from California. **Magicalmeister** will try to back up a 39-1 upset in the Feb. 23 John Battaglia Memorial at Turfway and the Bodemeister colt has won two of three career starts under the direction of **James Chapman**. **Sky Promise** and **Arawak**, second and third in the Battaglia Memorial, are also back for the Jeff Ruby.

Completing the field are expected longshots **Cash Call Kitten**, **Dreamer's Point** and **Zanesville**. – **James Scully, Brisnet.com**

## OAKS

**GO NONI GO HEADS BOURBONETTE** – The Road to the Kentucky Oaks Championship Series continues Saturday with the \$100,000 Bourbonette Oaks (GIII) at Turfway Park and will award 20-8-4-2 points to the Top 4 finishers.

Florida-shipper **Go Noni Go** is the 5-2 morning line favorite in the field of 11 following her six-length romp in a first-level allowance race over the turf at Gulfstream Park on Dec. 24 and a fifth-place effort in the Feb. 3 Sweetest Chant (GIII).

The duo of **Classy Music**, a third-place finisher in a first-level allowance at Keeneland last fall, and Cincinnati Trophy Stakes winner **In the Mood** are the lone fillies nominated for the Longines Kentucky Oaks (GI). – **Kevin Kerstein**

## PAST PERFORMANCES & HISTORY

- Brisnet.com Triple Crown PPs: <http://bit.ly/2oB2PLf>
- Brisnet.com Kentucky Oaks PPs: <http://bit.ly/2GTWrtX>
- Brisnet.com Rebel Stakes PPs: <http://bit.ly/2G0cdSe>
- Brisnet.com Jeff Ruby Steaks PPs: <http://bit.ly/2lpEznk>
- Rebel Stakes History: <http://bit.ly/2tUszHc>
- Jeff Ruby Steaks History: <http://bit.ly/2Gwvx7N>
- Road to the Kentucky Derby Leaderboard: <http://bit.ly/2BBapN7>
- Road to the Kentucky Oaks Leaderboard: <http://bit.ly/2t6SaFv>
- Kentucky Derby Media Guide Information: <http://bit.ly/2FbGuNP>

## ROAD TO DERBY VIDEO SERIES

- Episode 9: <http://bit.ly/2FyXLAo>
- Episode 8: <http://bit.ly/2GkXUEj>
- Episode 7: <http://bit.ly/2HkZk3l>
- Episode 6: <http://bit.ly/2ELeArY>
- Episode 5: <http://bit.ly/2odEVnI>
- Episode 4: <http://bit.ly/2HmXWNC>
- Episode 3: <http://bit.ly/2ELdZWQ>
- Episode 2: <http://bit.ly/2C4qsEh>
- Episode 1: <http://bit.ly/2Fz2GC5>

## THE RUNDOWN

### BOURBONETTE OAKS (GIII)

Saturday, March 17, \$100,000, 3yo, 1 Mile (Polytrack), Turfway Park (R9), 5:14 p.m. ET. RTKO Top 4 Points: 20-8-4-2. TV: TVG/TVG2.

#	Horse	Jockey	Trainer	ML
1.	Classy Music	Alan Garcia	Kenny McPeck	12-1
2.	Consolida++	Drayden Van Dyke	Paddy Gallagher	5-1
3.	Queen's Fate++	Rafael Hernandez	Mike Maker	8-1
4.	Child's Play++	Jack Gilligan	Gerald Brooks	30-1
5.	In the Mood	John McKee	Stephen Sandy	8-1
6.	Hey Negrita++	Mitchell Murrill	Marshall Godsey Jr.	15-1
7.	Mauk's Tuff++	Alberto Pusac	William Mauk	20-1
8.	Mo Flash++	Gabriel Saez	Mark Casse	10-1
9.	Homemade Salsa++	Chris Landeros	Mike Maker	8-1
10.	Bet She Wins++	Albin Jiminez	Chris Block	3-1
11.	Go Noni Go++	Tyler Gaffalione	Mike Maker	5-2

### JEFF RUBY STEAKS (GIII)

Saturday, March 17, \$200,000, 3yo, 1 1/8 M (Polytrack), Turfway Park (R10), 6 p.m. ET. RTKD Top 4 Points: 20-8-4-2. TV: TVG/TVG2.

#	Horse	Jockey	Trainer	ML
1.	Sky Promise+	Jack Gilligan	Kenny McPeck	12-1
2.	Cash Call Kitten+	Tyler Gaffalione	Mike Maker	12-1
3.	Archaggelos+	Rafael Hernandez	Michael Dickinson	6-1
4.	Pony Up	Albin Jiminez	Todd Pletcher	6-1
5.	Magicalmeister	John McKee	James Chapman	12-1
6.	Mugaritz+	Nik Juarez	Jonathan Wong	6-1
7.	Hazit	Drayden Van Dyke	Todd Pletcher	5-1
8.	Blended Citizen+	Kyle Frey	Doug O'Neill	6-1
9.	Dreamer's Point	Chris Landeros	Ian Wilkes	15-1
10.	Zanesville+	Malcom Franklin	Tom Amoss	12-1
11.	Ride a Comet	Gabriel Saez	Mark Casse	5-1
12.	Arawak+	Julio Garcia	Wesley Ward	15-1

### REBEL STAKES (GII)

Saturday, March 17, \$900,000, 3yo, 1 1/16 M, Oaklawn Park (R10), 7:09 p.m. ET. RTKD Top 4 Points: 50-20-10-5. TV: TVG/TVG2.

#	Horse	Jockey	Trainer	ML
1.	Title Ready	Jose Ortiz	Steve Asmussen	8-1
2.	Curlin's Honor	Florent Geroux	Mark Casse	12-1
3.	Solomini	Flavien Prat	Bob Baffert	3-2
4.	Magnum Moon	Luis Saez	Todd Pletcher	7-2
5.	Higher Power	Richard Eramia	Donnie Von Hemel	20-1
6.	Pryor+	David Cabrera	Ron Moquett	30-1
7.	Sporting Chance	John Velazquez	D. Wayne Lukas	5-1
8.	High North	Gary Stevens	Brad Cox	12-1
9.	Zing Zang	Corey Lanerie	Steve Asmussen	20-1
10.	Combatant	Ricardo Santana Jr.	Steve Asmussen	8-1
11.	Bode's Maker+	Jareth Loveberry	Allen Milligan	50-1

+ Not Kentucky Derby Nominated

++ Not Kentucky Oaks Nominated

## DERBY DETAIL

**DISQUALIFICATIONS** – Last Saturday's disqualification of **McKinzie** in the San Felipe was only the second time in the 81-year history of the race that the winner was taken down. The first was **Desert Time** in 1983. After a contentious stretch drive, the stewards deemed McKinzie, who crossed the wire a half-length in front of **Bolt d'Oro**, bumped the **Mick Ruis**-owned and trained colt and cost him a placing. In the last 20 years, Bolt d'Oro was only the fourth horse to be placed first via disqualification in a Kentucky Derby Championship Series race: **It'saknockout** (2015 Fountain of Youth, **Upstart** disqualified); **First Samauri** (2006 Fountain of Youth, **Corinthian**, disqualified); and **Capetown** (1998 Florida Derby, **Lil's Lad**, disqualified). – **Kevin Kerstein**

**BAFFERT REBEL SUCCESS** – Hall of Fame trainer **Bob Baffert** is attempting to win his record-extending seventh Rebel Stakes when he ships **Solomini** to the Natural State from his Southern California base. The 62-year-old conditioner has used the Rebel to springboard many of his top Derby contenders to the Arkansas Derby (GI) including 2015 Triple Crown winner **American Pharoah**. Baffert's Rebel triumphs: **Lookin at Lucky** (2010), **The Factor** (2011), **Secret Circle** (2012), **Hoppertunity** (2014), **American Pharoah** (2015) and **Cupid** (2016). – **Kevin Kerstein**

**WATCHING THE WEATHER** – Below is a look at the **National Weather Service** forecast for this weekend's Road to the Kentucky Derby and Road to the Kentucky Oaks Championship Series races:

Track	Location	Weather	Race
Oaklawn	Hot Springs, Ark.	Mostly sunny, with a high near 73.	Rebel Stakes
Turfway	Florence, Ky.	A chance of rain or freezing rain before 9am, then a chance of rain showers. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 47. Chance of precipitation is 50%.	Jeff Ruby Steaks; Bourbonette Oaks

**DOWN THE STRETCH** – **Godolphin** reported Monday that their homebred, **Avery Island**, has been sidelined to undergo an evaluation from **Dr. Larry Bramlage** at Rood & Riddle Equine Hospital near Lexington after the colt came back lame from his March 9 breeze at Palm Meadows in Florida. "It's very disappointing for all of us here at Godolphin, and plans are on hold until we know more about the injury," said trainer **Kiaran McLaughlin**. **Avery Island** was pointing towards next Saturday's Louisiana Derby (GII). ... **Exclamation Point**, the half-brother to 2016 2-Year-Old Champion Classic Empire, is expected to be seen next in the April 14 Northern Spur at Oaklawn Park or Lexington at Keeneland, according to trainer **Brad Cox**. – **Kevin Kerstein**

## SPOTLIGHT HORSE: BRAVAZO

Hall of Fame trainer **D. Wayne Lukas** is on target to have his record-extending 49<sup>th</sup> starter in the Kentucky Derby (GI) with **Calumet Farm's** homebred **Bravazo**. The Awesome Again colt was a 21-1 upset winner in the Feb. 17 Risen Star (GII) at Fair Grounds and could be one of the top betting choices in next weekend's Louisiana Derby (GII). Bravazo frequently exceeded expectations throughout his young career including a 47-1 runner-up finish behind **Free Drop Billy** in the Oct. 7 Breeders' Futurity (GI) at Keeneland. Following a third-place effort in the Oct. 29 Street Sense and a sub-par 10<sup>th</sup>-place finish in the Kentucky Jockey Club (GII) at Churchill Downs, Bravazo began his 3-year-old campaign with a hard-fought win in a first-level allowance at Oaklawn Park.

- **Horse information:** (7-3-1-1—\$426,528)
  - **Owner:** Calumet Farm (Brad Kelley)
  - **Trainer:** D. Wayne Lukas
  - **Last Jockey:** Miguel Mena
  - **Breeder:** Calumet Farm (Ky.)
  - **Sire:** Awesome Again (Deputy Minister)
  - **Dam:** Tiz o'Gold (Cee's Tizzy)
  - **Named After:** Spanish term for "excellent"
- **Owner information:** Calumet Farm was founded in 1924 by **William Monroe Wright**, owner of Calumet Baking Powder. Wright's son **Warren** took over the farm in 1932 following his death and began moving the business to Thoroughbred racing. Calumet dominated the Thoroughbred industry in the 1940s and '50s with multiple champions and Kentucky Derby winners. The farm became the first owner to succeed \$1 million in purse earnings in 1947. Kelley took over Calumet in 2014. The businessman is the fourth-largest land owner in the United States. Kelley was the founder of Commonwealth Brands tobacco company and sold the business for \$1 billion in 2001. Kelley, who has net worth of approximately \$2.2 billion, according to Forbes.com, lives a very private life in Franklin, Tenn. and very rarely gives interviews. Calumet Farm has the most wins in the Kentucky Derby by an owner (22-8-4-1): **Whirlaway** (1941), **Pensive** ('44), **Citation** ('48), **Ponder** ('49), **Hill Gail** ('52), **Iron Liege** ('57), **Tim Tam** ('58), and **Forward Pass** ('68). They also bred a record nine winners.
- **Trainer Information:** Hall of Fame trainer D. Wayne Lukas, 82, is a four-time Kentucky Derby-winning trainer (48-4-1-5): **Winning Colors** (1988), **Thunder Gulch** ('95), **Grindstone** ('96), and **Charismatic** ('99). Born in 1935 in Wisconsin, Lukas is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a master's degree in education. Lukas taught high school for nine years and coached basketball prior to training horses. A champion quarter horse trainer in the late 1960s and early '70s, Lukas transitioned to Thoroughbreds in the late '70s and quickly rose to the top of the rankings. A four-time Eclipse Award Outstanding Trainer winner (1985-87, and '94), Lukas was inducted into the United States' Racing Hall of Fame in 1999 and the American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame in 2007. Lukas resides in Louisville with his wife Laurie. — **Kevin Kerstein**

## FUTURE WAGER FINAL ODDS

Pool 3 of the Kentucky Derby Future Wager along with the lone Kentucky Oaks Future Wager closed Sunday, Feb. 26. Below are the final odds. The final Kentucky Derby Future Wager will take place April 6-8.

### KDFW POOL 3 FIELD

#	Horse	ML
1	Audible	13-1
2	Avery Island	29-1
3	Bolt d'Oro	7-1
4	Bravazo	40-1
5	Catholic Boy	21-1
6	Combatant	57-1
7	Flameaway	31-1
8	Free Drop Billy	44-1
9	Gold Town (GB)	52-1
10	Good Magic	11-1
11	Instilled Regard	41-1
12	Justify	6-1
13	Kanthaka	57-1
14	Magnum Moon	25-1
15	McKinzie	9-1
16	Mendelssohn	28-1
17	My Boy Jack	31-1
18	Noble Indy	60-1
19	Promises Fulfilled	24-1
20	Solomini	17-1
21	Sporting Chance	39-1
22	Strike Power	56-1
23	Vino Rosso	39-1
24	Mutuel Field	4-1

### KOFW FIELD

#	Horse	ML
1	Amy's Challenge	20-1
2	Best Performance	41-1
3	C.S. Incharge	41-1
4	Caledonia Road	12-1
5	Classy Act	51-1
6	Coach Rocks	60-1
7	Cosmic Burst	21-1
8	Dream Tree	7-1
9	Eskimo Kisses	31-1
10	Gas Station Sushi	67-1
11	Heavenhasmynikki	54-1
12	Midnight Bisou	6-1
13	Midnight Disguise	13-1
14	Monomoy Girl	6-1
15	Patrona Margarita	68-1
16	Paved	13-1
17	Rayya	60-1
18	Red Ruby	23-1
19	Sassy Sienna	57-1
20	Spring Lily	51-1
21	Take Charge Paula	18-1
22	Thirteen Squared	40-1
23	Wonder Gadot	21-1
24	Mutuel Field	5-1

## SCULLY'S KENTUCKY DERBY REPORT

A pair of races at Santa Anita last weekend excited fans and invigorated the 2018 Kentucky Derby picture.

The San Felipe (GII) led the way Saturday with spectacular theater as **Bolt d'Oro** and **McKinzie** engaged in a head-and-head battle through the stretch. A controversial disqualification could not overshadow the exhilaration generated by a showdown between top-ranked contenders.

Power and grace were on display a day later as **Justify** remained unbeaten with a two-turn allowance win, delivering a scintillating performance that catapulted him to 6-1 favoritism among individual interests in Pool 3 of the Kentucky Derby Future Wager.

Elsewhere, the Gotham (GIII) and Tampa Bay Derby (GII) were offered without the same fanfare and respective winners **Enticed** and **Quip** virtually guaranteed themselves a Kentucky Derby berth picking up 50-point prizes in the qualifiers.

### San Felipe

After a couple of months with little buzz in the Road to the Kentucky Derby series, the San Felipe produced the race we were waiting for as Bolt d'Oro and McKinzie hooked up leaving the far turn and went at it all the way to the finish line. McKinzie prevailed by a head but after drifting out into his rival in the latter stages, he was disqualified by stewards and Bolt d'Oro was placed first.

Contested over 1 1/16 miles, it was a roughly run affair with multiple incidents and I wouldn't have made a change afterward. Bolt d'Oro arrived at the five-sixteenths pole three wide and while straightening into the stretch, he angled into the two-path and exchanged a couple of hard bumps with McKinzie. Stewards ruled it inconclusive but I thought Bolt d'Oro instigated the roughhousing by putting McKinzie in tight quarters along the rail. He continued to lean on his rival through the stretch and McKinzie drifted out late under left-handed urging.

Would McKinzie have veered out without the early contact? That was inconclusive in my book and the better horse (on this day) finished first on the wire. Stewards took their sweet time before reaching a decision to reverse.

McKinzie raced up close from the start and fought back determinedly after Bolt d'Oro stuck a head in front in upper stretch. He failed to maintain a straight course but Bolt d'Oro never appeared to be getting by in deep stretch. McKinzie brought a recency edge into the San Felipe, winning a pair of graded stakes wins over the winter for **Bob Baffert**, and Bolt d'Oro performed admirably making his first appearance in more than four months for **Mick Ruis**.

A smashing winner of the FrontRunner (GI) last fall, Bolt d'Oro bungled the start recording a third as the 3-5 favorite in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile (GI) and broke slowly in three of four attempts last year. He added the services of **Javier Castellano** for the San Felipe and left the gate smoothly from his innermost post, settling into a comfortable stalking trip behind horses before advancing into contention on the far turn.

A triple-digit BRIS Speed rating was the only thing missing as the top two received a 98 BRIS Speed rating. The track was still rated "fast" despite plenty of rainfall and it's fair to question how much the changing surface affected Speed ratings.

There may be some apprehension surrounding aftereffects, but I see no reason Bolt d'Oro can't keep moving forward off the hard race. Ruis didn't have his charge fully cranked and we've witnessed multiple horses win the Kentucky Derby who ran their hearts out but came up a little short making a demanding penultimate prep in the San Felipe (**Silver Charm** and **Real Quiet**). The well-built son of Medaglia d'Oro will use the Santa Anita Derby (GI) on April 7 as his final tune-up and I think Bolt d'Oro fits the 1 1/4-mile Kentucky Derby distance better than McKinzie.

McKinzie, who had registered BRIS Speed ratings of 100-100-104 in his first three starts, turned in another top-class performance but will probably need a jockey change for his final prep race since **Mike Smith** also rides Justify.

## ***Justify***

**Justify** has the goods but faces an uphill task after making his first start at Santa Anita on Feb. 18. It's been 135 years since the last unraced juvenile, **Apollo**, captured the Kentucky Derby and Justify has yet to be tested while registering excellent 100 and 104 BRIS Speed numbers in a pair of convincing wins.

The chestnut colt will get one opportunity to qualify for the Kentucky Derby and it will be interesting to see whether he comes back for the Santa Anita Derby or leaves the friendly home confines for a target like the Wood Memorial (GII) or

Arkansas Derby (GI). Justify figures to go favored either way, but I can't find a Kentucky Derby winner in modern times who raced exclusively at a single venue before arriving at Churchill Downs.

Following a 9 1/2-length maiden romp at seven furlongs, Baffert removed blinkers and stretched his pupil to a two-turn mile distance. The entry-level allowance was contested over a muddy track and for the second straight race, the son of Scat Daddy broke a step slow. It hasn't hurt him in a pair of short fields, with Justify meeting only four overmatched rivals in both outings, but will be something to watch for against stakes foes.

After rushing forward to lead wire-to-wire in his unveiling, Justify showed versatility rating behind the speed on Sunday. He blew into the lead with a few dynamic strides on the far turn and it was fun to watch his long and smooth action through the stretch as he effortlessly extended the winning margin to 6 1/2 lengths.

Justify has proven to be beautiful mover with freakish ability, but a lack of foundation isn't easily overcome by a 3-year-old on the first Saturday in May. He's opened his career in similar fashion to **Curlin**, who blistered maidens going seven furlongs in an early February debut and captured the Rebel Stakes by 5 1/4 easy lengths in his second start. The eventual Hall of Famer and two-time Horse of the Year looked more than capable when rolling to a 10 1/2-length victory in the Arkansas Derby, but Curlin wasn't a serious factor and sustained his first defeat with a third behind **Street Sense** and **Hard Spun** in the 2007 Kentucky Derby.

Some observers feel the "Apollo Curse" won't last with horses being more lightly-raced nowadays, but I'm not sure about the correlation. It's asking a lot for Justify to squeeze three starts into a seven-week window (if he runs in Santa Anita Derby) before an extreme 1 1/4-mile test against 19 challengers four weeks later. A number of sophomore rivals, including Bolt d'Oro and **Enticed**, will be making at least their sixth stakes start in the Kentucky Derby, the same level of experience Street Sense and Hard Spun had when beating Curlin on the first Saturday in May.

It's more about the competition. Curlin and **Bodemeister** (second in 2012) were forced to settle for placings behind top-class opponents, but circumstances may have been ripe for a breakthrough if they had come along in 2005 when **Afleet Alex** failed to fire and pair of slow longshots (**Giacomo** and **Closing Argument**) duked it out through a glacial final furlong. I like to think they could've beaten the fields **Big Brown** (2008) and **California Chrome** (2014) faced.

Perhaps Justify's rivals won't keep moving forward and he can finally snap one of the most imposing trends in all of sports. I remain dubious but will keep an open mind heading into the final round of prep races.

## ***Gotham***

**Enticed** revived his Kentucky Derby hopes posting a 2 3/4-length decision in the Gotham, rallying to overhaul front-running **Old Time Revival** in deep stretch of the one-turn mile event at Aqueduct. He looked sharp in the final furlong and registered an excellent 104 BRIS Speed rating, but Enticed received a plum outside trip he seems to desire and wasn't hurt by ground loss at the one-turn mile distance.

Trained by **Kiaran McLaughlin**, the **Godolphin** homebred son of Medaglia d'Oro resented being inside in his first two starts, behaving rankly in traffic recording a maiden win and a third in the Champagne (GI), and jockey **Junior Alvarado** kept Enticed off the rail and in a forward position en route to his narrow victory in the Kentucky Jockey Club (GII) at Churchill Downs in late November.

The Gotham was held about 10 minutes after the Tampa Bay Derby and Enticed became the fourth runner from the Kentucky Jockey Club to win a Kentucky Derby qualifier, joining third-placer **Promises Fulfilled** (Fountain of Youth), seventh-placer **Quip** (Tampa Bay Derby) and 10th-placer **Bravazo** (Risen Star).

The victory had to be sweet for Alvarado, who was replaced by **Joel Rosario** in the Feb. 3 Holy Bull (GII) at Gulfstream Park, but Enticed drew the rail and was compromised by an inside trip rather than pilot error posting a well-beaten fourth as the 9-5 favorite in his seasonal debut. The dark bay colt received a career-best 95 BRIS Late Pace number winning the Gotham under wraps, with Alvarado gearing down his mount as soon as he struck the front, but Enticed was kept widest of all the entire way without a straw in his path.

With his running style, traffic issues are a staple of the 20-horse Kentucky Derby and Enticed must be able to handle being stuck inside of horses to prosper. I don't want to see another outside trip where he has clear sailing in the final prep.

Laurel shipper Old Time Revival outperformed his 35-1 odds, finishing four lengths clear of third as he recorded a second consecutive runner-up stakes effort, but the need-the-lead type appears to favor one-turn distances.

**Free Drop Billy** and **Firenze Fire** didn't appear ready for prime time finishing up the track in third and fourth, respectively, and any enthusiasm surrounding their Kentucky Derby chances has dimmed.

### *Tampa Bay Derby*

Quip tracked moderate splits and wore down pacesetter **World of Trouble** in the stretch of the Tampa Bay Derby, earning his first stakes victory with a one-length tally. Overlooked at 19-1 in his first start since a troubled seventh in the Kentucky Jockey Club, the front-running son of Distorted Humor has now won three of four career starts for trainer **Rudolphe Brisset** and regular rider **Florent Geroux** was up.

He will add more speed to the Kentucky Derby line-up. Front-running types **Promises Fulfilled** (52 points) and **Bravazo** (54) are also well-positioned, and **Snapper Sinclair** (22) and **Strike Power** (20) will be looking to cement a berth in the final prep.

After concluding 2017 with a declining set of BRIS Speed ratings (88-86-84), Quip turned things around with a 98 Speed. But the overall quality of the Tampa Bay Derby field is in doubt and **Flameaway** arguably outperformed the winner, closing fast for second after a terrible start.

World of Trouble held third in his first two-turn start but his future appears to be in sprints. **Vino Rosso** came up empty adding blinkers for **Todd Pletcher**, winding up about five lengths back of third. I still like the Curlin colt's long-term potential but Vino Rosso took a step back in the clunker.

### *Europeans*

Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf (GI) winner **Mendelssohn**, a half-brother to Grade I main track scorers **Beholder** and **Into Mischief**, switched from turf to Polytrack for the March 9 Patton Stakes at Dundalk, Ireland and rallied up the inside to win going away by about a length. The one-mile event should provide valuable fitness for the **Aidan O'Brien** trainee and the U.A.E. Derby (GII) on March 31 will provide a better gauge upon his Kentucky Derby prospects.

Mendelssohn is by Scat Daddy, who is also represented by Justify and **Combatant** this year.

Kempton Park, England hosted a European Road to the Kentucky Derby qualifier on March 7 and **Gronkowski** offered a sustained late run to prove best. By turf sire Lonhro, Gronkowski has some dirt influences in his female family, with his dam being a half-sister to Grade I winner **Flashy Bull**, and trainer **Jeremy Noseda** plans to prep the English-based colt in either the Blue Grass (GII) or Wood Memorial (GII).

As **Bold Arrangement** proved back in the mid-1980s, parlaying a third in the Blue Grass at Keeneland into a runner-up finish in the Kentucky Derby (he's wearing the roses if **Shoemaker** doesn't get through making a daring inside move aboard **Ferdinand** in upper stretch), the best chance for a European-based horse to win the Kentucky Derby is to ship over for a prep race.

I don't know whether Gronkowski will prove good enough, but kudos to Noseda for utilizing the proper strategy.

### *Up Next*

**Solomini** will be the last big name from 2017 to open his 3-year-old campaign when he returns in Saturday's \$900,000 Rebel (GII) at Oaklawn Park. The 1 1/16-mile test offers a total of 85 points to the top four finishers (50-20-10-5 scale) and Solomini was last seen out finishing McKinzie by about a length in the Dec. 9 Los Alamitos Futurity (G1). He's trained by Baffert, who has won six of the last eight runnings of the Rebel.

Solomini was disqualified and placed third for interfering with another rival in his juvenile finale but I liked how the evolving Curlin colt displayed push-button acceleration for the first time, dropping back to last on the backstretch after racing forwardly when second in Breeders' Cup Juvenile and FrontRunner. The chestnut colt was still growing into his massive frame last year and I'm buying Solomini's stock heading into the Rebel.

His main rivals include **Combatant** and **Sporting Chance**, second and third in the Feb. 19 Southwest (GIII) at Oaklawn; and **Curlin's Honor** and **Magnum Moon**, a pair of unbeaten colts making their first stakes appearance for **Mark Casse** and Pletcher, respectively.

Turfway Park's centerpiece event, the \$200,000 Jeff Ruby Steaks (GIII) (formerly the Spiral), drew a contentious field of 12 for 1 1/8 miles on Polytrack and offers a total of 34 points (20-8-4-2). Pletcher ship in the pair of **Hazit** and **Pony Up**, and the top three from the local John Battaglia Memorial – **Magicalmeister**, **Sky Promise** and **Arawak** – are all back. – *James Scully, Brisnet.com*



## TAKING SHAPE

The possible fields for Kentucky Derby Championship Series races are fluid as horsemen vie for points on the Road to the Kentucky Derby Presented by Woodford Reserve. Below are known horses (with Road to the Kentucky Derby point totals) mentioned to be under consideration for each race based on published news reports and other sources. Again, the shape of these fields is fluid and some horses are considered “possible” for multiple races:

**MARCH 24 LOUISIANA DERBY** – \$1 Million Louisiana Derby (GII) to be run over 1 1/8 miles at Fair Grounds in New Orleans, La.: Bravazo (54), Snapper Sinclair (22), Instilled Regard (19)\*, My Boy Jack (10), Noble Indy (10), Dark Templar (0), Kentucky Club (0), Retirement Fund (0). **Points to Top 4:** 100-40-20-10.

**MARCH 25 SUNLAND DERBY** – \$800,000 Sunland Derby (GIII) to be run over 1/18 miles at Sunland Park in Hobbs, New Mexico: Justify (0), New York Hero (0), Reride (0), Runaway Ghost (0). **Points to Top 4:** 50-20-10-5.

**MARCH 31 UAE DERBY** – \$2 million UAE Derby (GII) to be run over 1 3/16 miles at Meydan Racecourse in Dubai: Mendelssohn (20)\*\*, Threepence (8)\*\*, Seahenge (4)\*\*, Gold Town (GB) (0), Raaya (0), Ruggero (JPN) (0), Taiki Ferveur (JPN) (0), Yulong Warrior. **Points to Top 4:** 100-40-20-10.

**MARCH 31 FLORIDA DERBY** – \$1 million Florida Derby (GI) to be run over 1 1/8 miles at Gulfstream Park in Hallandale, Fla.: Promises Fulfilled (50), Strike Power (20), Catholic Boy (14), Audible (10), Machismo\* (5), Storm Runner\* (0). **Points to Top 4:** 100-40-20-10.

**APRIL 7 WOOD MEMORIAL** – \$750,000 Wood Memorial (GII) to be run over 1 1/8 miles at Aqueduct in Ozone Park, N.Y.: Enticed (63), Quip\* (50), Firenze Fire (29), Old Time Revival (20), Gronkowski (20)\*\*, Good Magic\* (10), Vino Rosso (7), Machismo\* (5), Gidu-IRE (0)\*, Justify\* (0), Westerdale (0). **Points to Top 4:** 100-40-20-10.

**APRIL 7 BLUE GRASS** – \$1 million Blue Grass Stakes (GII) to be run over 1 1/8 miles at Keeneland Racecourse in Lexington, Ky.: Quip\* (50), Flameaway (30), Free Drop Billy (24), Gronkowski (20)\*\*, Good Magic\* (10), Gidu-IRE (0)\*, Storm Runner\* (0). **Points to Top 4:** 100-40-20-10.

**APRIL 7 SANTA ANITA DERBY** – \$1 million Santa Anita Derby (GI) to be run over 1 1/8 miles at Santa Anita Park in Arcadia, Calif.: Bolt d'Oro (64), McKinzie\* (40), Instilled Regard\* (19), Justify\* (0). **Points to Top 4:** 100-40-20-10.

**APRIL 14 ARKANSAS DERBY** – \$1 million Arkansas Derby (GI) to be run over 1 1/8 miles at Oaklawn Park in Hot Springs, Ark.: My Boy Jack\* (10), Gidu-IRE (0)\*, Justify\* (0). **Points to Top 4:** 100-40-20-10.

**APRIL 14 LEXINGTON** – \$200,000 Lexington Stakes (GIII) to be run 1 1/16 miles at Keeneland Racecourse in Lexington, Ky.: Greyvitos (10), Core Beliefs (0), Exclamation Point (0), Mask (0), Telekinesis (0). **Points to Top 4:** 20-8-4-2.

\*Under consideration for multiple races.

\*\* Points were earned in European Road to the Kentucky Derby.